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THE COMING CRASH IN RUSSIA.

BY KARL BLIND.

I.

"*Ça ira!*" ("It will succeed!") was the frequent answer of Franklin during his mission at Paris, to those Frenchmen who doubted the possibility of a final triumph of the American War of Independence, with its often-changing ups and downs. In later years, during the great French Revolution, Franklin's expression was embodied in a well-known terroristic song dinned into the ears of many a victim of popular wrath.

"*Ça ira!*" may be said of the present constitutional struggle in Russia, in spite of repeated reactionary counterstrokes. And let the Tsar bethink himself in time, lest, in an uncontrollable storm of fury among downtrodden classes and races, scenes should be enacted which all friends of humanity would see prevented.

Russia's Grand Inquisitor, the head of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, means to bind the Monarch to the maintenance of strict despotic rule in the name of the oath he has taken as "Autokrator." Against the Tsar's violation of the oath he took as constitutional ruler of the Grand-Duchy of Finland, the clericalist Tartuffe has nothing to say. But to grant a measure of representative institutions to a people which has become sick of arbitrary imprisonments; sick of the horrors of Siberia for political suspects and patriotic offenders; sick of the infamous massacres of Blagovestchensk, Kisheneff and Gomel; sick of the corruption and malversation in every branch of the civil and military administration; sick of a mendacious diplomacy which is loathed by the whole civilized world; sick of the foul and positively criminal intrigues in the concerns of neighboring nations; sick unto death of an aggressive, never satisfied, ambition which results in inefficiency and in horrible catastrophes—to grant a

measure of representative institutions as a means of warding off further unbearable evils of this kind, that, forsooth, would be an unforgivable dereliction of monarchical duty, in the eyes of the holy man of the Orthodox Church.

"By Thy unlimited will," the heartless clericalist monster writes, "Thou hast sent out to the war hundreds of thousands of sons of the Orthodox Church. Thou hast the right, as Autocrat and as the Anointed of God, to do everything Thou likest in accordance with Thy Wisdom and Thy heart's desire—to send them unto death, or to show them Thy grace. Thou hast the right to let Thy Mercy or Thy Anger be felt by any one Thou dealest with. But do not forget, O Tsar, that Thou hast not the right to break Thy coronation oath, sworn in the Uspenski Church, when Thy sublime countenance was shining with rays of illumination, and Thou didst bear the symbols of irresponsible power given to Thee by Thy ancestors!"

It was for the object of undoing the effect of the wise and sensible letter of Prince Trubetzkoi that the sinister mouthpiece of clericalism addressed himself to Nicholas II. A very plain warning had been given to the Monarch by the Prince. The Prince reminded the Tsar of a famous historical saying: "*Ce n'est plus une émeute; c'est une révolution!*"

Twice that historical saying has been followed by an issue fatal to a monarch who would not listen to warnings until it was too late. In the first instance, it was the Duke of Laroche-foucauld Liancourt who uttered the words in question to Louis XVI at the storming of the Bastille, in 1789. In the second instance, they were repeated by Marshal Marmont to Charles X on July 28, 1830. "I had the honor," the Marshal wrote in his report, "to inform Your Majesty that the crowds of people who disturbed the quietude of the capital had yesterday been dispersed by force. To-day they assemble anew—more numerous and more threateningly than before. This is no longer a seditious tumult (*émeute*). It is a Revolution. Now it is the highest time for Your Majesty to take measures for the restoration of peace."

But it was too late—the Bourbon dynasty fell.

II.

Prince Sergius Trubetzkoi, who has given to Nicholas II such terrible but timely warning as to the danger that would befall

the person of the Monarch himself, if no Parliament were granted, comes from a noteworthy ancestry. His family hail from the former ruling Grand-Dukes of Lithuania. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Trubetzkoi were already known as favoring the cause of progress and enlightenment. The present holder of the name is one of the wealthiest landowners in Russia, and one of the most highly cultured members of the aristocracy. He is distinguished for his efforts to raise the sadly neglected educational status of the masses, whom Tsardom purposely leaves in a condition of ignorance useful to absolutistic rule. He resisted the reactionary measures of Plehve. He supported Schipoff, the well-known organizer of the Zemstvo movement. As President or Nobiliary Marshal of the Provincial Diet of Moscow, he has exhibited signal courage. After the recent disturbances among the Army Reservists, who refused obedience to the authorities and committed excesses on the Crown domains, Prince Trubetzkoi personally went to the Tsar to explain to him the great perils of the situation.

Some details as to the military rising of 1825, in which an ancestor of Prince Trubetzkoi took a prominent part, will here be in place. It was after the wars successfully waged by Germany and Russia against Napoleon I that much commotion arose among the educated civic classes, as well as among the army officers, in the Tsar's Empire. The Russian troops had passed and repassed, in 1813-15, through Germany and France, and seen and heard there a great deal which formed an enormous contrast to the state of things in their own country. The officers, at all events, became deeply impressed. From that time, Liberal ideas began to spread. Gradually men bethought themselves of acting on the lines of the German *Jugend-Bund*, and of similar secret societies, which had worked for the overthrow of the Corsican tyrant, and which then still endeavored to forward the cause of national and constitutional aspirations in the Fatherland.

The first attempt of that kind in Russia was made at the headquarters of Prince Wittgenstein, in Lithuania, the ancestral home of the Trubetzkoi. Two brothers Murawieff were the prime movers in so far as, going from Lithuania to St. Petersburg, they sounded other officers belonging to the Imperial Guard, among whom they found a ready response. Nothing of any importance occurred, however, until Colonel Pestel, an adjutant of Prince

Wittgenstein, became the virtual leader. Of German descent, but born in Russia, he had been educated at Dresden, and afterwards became an Imperial page in St. Petersburg. His father was Governor-General of Siberia. Having bravely fought in the campaigns against France, young Pestel rapidly rose in rank. It is supposed that he was the founder, in 1817, of the clandestine "League of Well-Being," also called "The Worthy Sons of the Fatherland." A number of those conspirators were by no means opposed to the dynastic principle. They rather, like Stein, Hardenberg, Gneisenau, Arndt and Jahn in Germany, sought to save monarchy in spite of itself.

Soon, however, that League was dissolved, and a new one founded, as "The Society of Public Welfare." Its statutes were copied from those of the German *Jugend-Bund*. French, German and English ideas of progress were the theme of discussion. The majority of the members were in favor of the emancipation of the serfs. Admirals, Generals and a number of other officers, with some writers, were banded together in this secret society.

There were two chief branches of the secret "Society of Public Welfare": one in the North, with St. Petersburg and Moscow as head centres; and one in the South, with Kieff and some other towns in the same position. In this new Society, Paul Pestel and Nikita Murawieff became the leaders. Presently, almost the whole staff of Field-Marshal Prince Wittgenstein joined the conspiracy. Among the highest nobility, in the upper circles of the civil administration, even in the close surroundings of the Court, there were associates.

Pestel, a man of unshakable courage and energy, carried in the Society of the South a resolution to the effect that, after the overthrow of Autocracy, the serfs should be emancipated, with a grant of freehold land. In the discussions as to whether a constitution on the English pattern should be adopted, he conceded to those who were in favor of it that this might be good; but, for his part, he "would prefer the American Constitution, which would be good for everybody, not only for lords and merchants." He thought that by physical force alone could an absolute ruler be made to cede a portion of his power.

At St. Petersburg, the reconstructed Society had at first Prince Trubetzkoi at its head; then Nicholas Murawieff and Prince Obolenski. I pass over some other secret associations, such as

the "United Slavs," and a Polish League which was brought into connection with the Society of Pestel.

Pestel was at the head of a regiment which was held to follow him wherever he would lead it. The plan was to wait for the day when Alexander I would be at Taganrog for the manoeuvres. On that occasion, the Tsar, Prince Wittgenstein and some Generals who kept with the Court were to be arrested. A fortress was to be seized, and then the signal for the Revolution at large was to be waited for in the shape of an insurrection of the friends at St. Petersburg and Warsaw.

The full amalgamation between the two branches in the North and the South, which Pestel sought to bring about, was, unfortunately, hampered by many difficulties; the men in the North being not so fully imbued with democratic ideas as those in the South. Still, a number of those in the North declared that if the Tsar could not be induced to accept constitutional terms, nothing would be left but to *banish the whole Imperial family*. In the later Report of the Judicial Inquiry which dealt with the events of 1825, it is asserted that Colonel Schweikoffski even proposed sending men to Taganrog to take the life of the Tsar. Artamon Murawieff, the Report asserts, offered himself for the deed.

Whilst the rising had been planned for the year 1826, Alexander I unexpectedly died on December 1st, 1825. This in great measure disconcerted the plan. Yet, the equally unexpected publication of the Act of Resignation of the real heir presumptive, Constantine, which for a short time threw Government affairs into confusion, seemed to be a help to the conspirators. On December 26th, 1825, they rose in arms in the capital. A few days before, a number of them, such as Prince Trubetzkoi, Ryleieff the poet, Bestujeff, Prince Obolenski, Prince Rostoffski, young Prince Odoeffski—an officer of the Horse Guards who kept them informed of what was going on in the Palace—had met at night for concerting action. They hoped that, in presence of a military insurrection, Nicholas could be forced into the acceptance of constitutional terms; if not, into a renunciation of the Crown. In the latter case, a provisional Government was to be set up, in which Prince Trubetzkoi would occupy a prominent post. A Constitutional Monarchy was the aim, with two Houses of Parliament.

On the day of the outbreak of the Revolution, St. Petersburg was filled with cries for a constitution. A portion of the Guards

and several companies of the Marines rose against Nicholas I. During this insurrection, shots were fired against the new Emperor himself, when he attempted to bring these troops back to obedience. But for the energy of Prince Eugene of Würtemberg, the day might have been decided against Nicholas I.

There is a Memoir of Baron Korff, published by the order of Nicholas himself, in which it is said that the Tsar was unable on that day, from morning till late at night, to partake of any repast, and that he never went to bed the whole night. He remained up in uniform, personally examining the chief prisoners. The Empress Alexandra had, from the excitement, "lost her voice and all strength." "All the Imperial children passed the night in two rooms, as in a bivouac."

In the South, sanguinary events took place in the mean time. Pestel, together with some of his chief associates, had been arrested in consequence of a secret denunciation. However, by the bold action of other officers, who went forth with some companies, these leaders were freed, and then a battle followed between the insurgent troops and the division of General Geismar. One of the Murawieffs fell. Another, severely wounded, was made a prisoner. Thus the movement in the South came to an end.

Pestel, Sergius Murawieff, Ryleieff, Bestujeff-Rumin, and Kahoffiski suffered death on the gallows. Prince Trubetzkoi was, at the prayer of his wife, spared from death, and carried off to Siberia with eighty-three other leaders. The insurgent soldiers of the Guards were sent against the mountain tribes of the Caucasus. Nicholas Turguenieff distinctly asserts that the most abominable atrocities were committed against the prisoners:

"The answers and the declarations of the accused of 1826 resemble too much those which were formerly drawn out by the system of torture not to have been the result of analogous means. . . . The Minister of War having been informed that Colonel Pestel had just been led into St. Petersburg, the first words which came from the Minister's lips were *an order to subject him to the torture*. I purposely use here a general expression, not wishing, by a more precise statement, to add disgust to horror."

III.

Such were the means by which Nicholas I came to the throne as an Autocrat. How now about Nicholas II, who once declared that he would walk in the footsteps of this ancestor of his?

No longer has the present Tsar only a class of dissatisfied nobles and military officers to contend with. True, the great land-owners, the aristocratic heads and the general members of the Provincial Diets, are decidedly against him; but the University students, the medical men, the engineers, the mass of public writers, the working-classes in the towns, the village teachers even, are now actively in the movement for the establishment of a Parliament. In many provinces of Old Russia, agrarian discontent and riots add to the critical situation; at the same time, there is unrest in Finland, in Poland, aye, even in those south-western provinces of European Russia, where there is a Ruthene-Slav population of a type distinct from the Muscovites, and with an oppressed language of its own. Nay, in the Armenian province of the Tsar's Empire there are signs of danger. Everywhere there is discontent or open revolt.

Among the strange things which have latterly happened in Russia more than once, a kind of demonstration must be mentioned which gives peculiar importance to the timely warning Prince Trubetskoi recently addressed to the Tsar. At Kieff, which is the most ancient capital, there is a "Literary Society." In a largely attended meeting of that Society, speeches were made by several University Professors on the given theme: "What Russia Is In Want Of." The audience was composed of about 800 persons; among them, many lawyers, even Crown Attorneys; a great number of the provincial bureaucracy; some officers of the army; ten University Professors, and various notable citizens. All the speakers came to the conclusion that "only a constitution can save us."

But more extraordinary than anything was this: "At the mention," so the fully authenticated report says, "of the name of Balmasheff, the assassin of Sipiaguine, those present honored the memory of Balmasheff, who was hanged, by rising from their seats! Lastly, the health of Sassanoff, the slayer of Plehve, was drunk after the lectures. Lawyers and officers, applauding the toast, raised their glasses as well."

A similar demonstration occurred afterwards again at one of the greatest political banquets at St. Petersburg itself, where medical men, professors, public writers, engineers, and other men of the cultured classes had foregathered. There, too, the whole assembly rose in honor of Sassanoff and his associate. It is always

so in times of turmoil when men are driven to despair by an unbearable despotism.

IV.

Professor von Reussner, who for years taught Public Law and Criminal Jurisprudence at the Russian University of Tomsk, has expressed the conviction that, "if the Tsar does not resolve upon granting a constitution, thus giving the Russian people the minimum of what even the Japanese possess, a Revolution is inevitable." Being asked from whom the Revolution is to proceed, seeing that the middle class, the "Third Estate," is not so developed in Russia, he answered that in his country it was not the "Third Estate" but the "First Estate," so to say, from which the initiative has come—namely, from all those who possess property and intellectual culture. He went on:

"By nature the Russians are not revolutionists. We are much too heavy and slow-going as a race; and it is a perfect wonder that things have come to such a pass, that the revolutionary flames are bursting forth in every direction. The war has effected this miracle. All classes of the nation are struck most heavily by this war. The towns and the rural communities are deeply affected by it to the same degree of suffering."

He then describes how, until lately, the Russian landowner was rather averse to ideas of political opposition. The war has roused him. His laborers are taken from him by military mobilization. The wages he has to pay rise correspondingly in the absence of sufficient hands. His produce cannot be disposed of, as the Army Administration has seized hold of all the railway trains. There is a dangerous fermentation among the peasantry, threatening the life and the property of the landowner. Industry, too, is paralyzed among the manufacturing class and its workmen. There is great fear as to the impossibility of maintaining the gold standard, which is but artificially kept up by continual loans abroad. Family life has become terribly disturbed, the upper ten thousand being now also drawn into the military vortex. Any one going to the Far East looks upon his forced departure as the probable end of his life; for it is generally held that what happens in that distant region is no longer regular warfare, but mere massacre. "Hence all Russia is filled with hatred of this war, and of the political state of things which has brought it about?"

"Down with the war! Down with the Autocracy!" is a cry heard from one end of the Empire to the other. Desertions increase; chiefly among Poles and Jews, which latter in Russia are still reckoned as a separate nationality, and in various provinces are thickly settled together.

Even among the backward part of the *mujiks*, who have hitherto only cared for questions concerning land tenure, the agitation for popular representation in Parliament has begun to make its mark. The colossal strike movement among the working-class at St. Petersburg and in other industrial centres, on whose activity depends the supply of the Army and Navy, is another grave sign of the situation, all the more so because its leaders have also joined the call for the establishment of a Parliament, and of all the other rights of civic freedom, as well as for full political amnesty and the recall of the exiles.

Though manufacturing industry has latterly been more developed in Russia proper, its chief centres are in the western provinces—in what Tsardom is pleased to call the "Vistula Department"—in other words in Poland. There are several distinct groups of malcontents in that ancient Polish Kingdom or Republic. They are: the National Democratic party; the so-called party of Reconciliation ("Ugodowcy"); and the Socialist League. All these actually wish well to the arms of the Japanese enemies of Tsardom. Various publications and manifestations of this sufficiently indicate those sentiments more or less strongly. The National Democrats and the Socialists speak openly in this sense. The Party of Reconciliation, which in the beginning advised greater caution, at the same time refrained carefully from anything that could be supposed to be in favor of Russia. Of late that party has confined itself to demands of reform, whilst the Democrats and the Socialists have organized demonstrations of the most energetic kind.

During a conflict between Polish workmen and Cossacks at Warsaw, a short time ago, the Chief of the Police, Nolken, received a blow on his head; whereupon shots were fired by the Cossacks, and three workmen were killed, sixteen wounded. Among the crowd, cries were uttered: "Down with Absolutism! Long live Poland!" At the departure of regular soldiers and Reservists, the most tumultuous scenes have repeatedly taken place at the stations. The Russian authorities have been engaged

since in "purifying" the Railway Administration from Polish officials. Of the Reservists, many thousands have escaped across the frontier, into Austria-Hungary. At Lublin, where a kinematograph of the Russo-Japanese war was shown, the march of the Japanese across the Yalu was received with cries of "Long live Japan! Bravo, Japan!" The representation was then suddenly stopped. Ever since, many Polish towns have afforded the same spectacle of riot and bloody encounters with the Cossacks, who, as a race apart, have always been used against both Muscovites and other nationalities, like the Finns and Poles.

Even the most moderate Polish party, headed by the Catholic Bishop of Warsaw and Count Tyszkiewicz, have handed significant demands to the Government at St. Petersburg. A meeting for that purpose, composed of 105 persons of notable position, was held in the palace of the Count. The resolutions adopted call for the reintroduction of the Polish language in schools, in courts of justice, and in Government offices; the reestablishment of the right of Poles to be appointed to public offices in the Kingdom of Poland; religious toleration for Catholics and Uniates; self-administration for the towns, and the introduction of Provincial Diets (*Zemstvos*) in Poland, with simultaneous maintenance of the existing Polish village communities.

V

On the furthest confines of the Empire, in its Armenian provinces, there has recently been founded a "Revolutionary National Armenian Federation," which aims at independence from the rule of the Tsar. In those Russian provinces, the Armenian race is in reality in the majority, though intermixed, here and there, with Tatar villages.

The Russian Government has once more exhibited its tyrannical character by the recent lawless seizure of Armenian Church property for the benefit of the Orthodox Russian Church. Hence, deep dissatisfaction in that region, even as in Poland and Finland. An organization of national and popular forces has been the result, which has mapped out the whole Armenian district of Russia for military preparation by means of Rifle Clubs; as well as for the administration of justice by "People's Tribunals," to which the Armenian peasantry resort in cases of litigation and for raising the educational status of the masses.

A "physical force" or terroristic branch of this Armenian Federation deals mercilessly with the most hated tools of the Tsar's Government, and with spies and traitors. Recently, its "Committee of National Defence" has issued a manifesto against the participation of Armenians in the war in the Far East, on the side of Russia. If the Tsar should order a mobilization among those subjects of his, lively occurrences may be expected of the same kind as in Poland.

Meanwhile, a great deal of violent action has been going on in that southeastern quarter of the Empire, both on the part of the Armenian Federationists, and of the Russian Government. Thousands of malcontents have been arrested; a number of them exiled to northern Departments; others kept imprisoned. Dragoonades—Cossackades, so to say—in the style of Louis XIV of France, have also been used by way of an "execution," about 100 to 200 Cossacks being quartered for some months upon Armenian villages where outbreaks against the Russian authorities had taken place. As another means of overcoming Armenian resistance, rumors were spread by Muscovite agents that the Armenians meant to massacre the Tatars settled among them. But the hope of thus getting the Tatars to "take measures for their own security" has so far been foiled. They saw through the dirty trick and remained quiet, not being molested by the Armenians, among whom they live.

Look wherever we may, the walls of the great prison-house called the Tsar's Empire, are showing cracks and signs of crumbling.

In the Nobiliary Diet of the Province of Twer an event has recently occurred which may find imitation in other Provincial Assemblies, and which is calculated to paralyze the Departmental Administration in the matter of taxation. A new Marshal of the Nobility for the Diet had to be elected; but the election of such a president could not be carried out, because every one of the candidates proposed refused to stand. One of them, Rodischeff, explained his refusal in these words: "In this present critical time, my place is not behind the Government table, where impartiality should be the rule, but in the ranks of parties, where an irreconcilable struggle of life and death is carried on against Bureaucracy, 'that inky plague' which oppresses all Russia. We shall fight for Right, Law and Freedom."

This speech was received with long-continued thunderous applause.

The Assembly then sent telegrams of warmest sympathy to Prince Galitzin, the head of the town of Moscow, and to Prince Trubetzkoi the two foremost champions of the Parliamentary cause. "All thinking Russia," it was said in the telegram from Twer, "is on your side, and an early victory cannot be doubtful." Another telegram was sent off to the Finnish Legislature at Helsingfors. It said: "The members of the Nobiliary Government Assembly of Twer send their sympathetic greeting to the Finnish Diet, and express their firm conviction that only in a free cooperation of all independently organized public forces of Russia and Finland is the guarantee to be found for the happiness and the progress in culture of the two nations."

Will Nicholas II still not listen to reason and to the claims of the most moderate men, whilst there is yet time for him? Will he wait till some of the troops begin to mutiny?

Nearly twenty-six years ago I wrote thus on the movement then going on in Russia:

"A despotism founded on the backwardness of the masses may for a long time keep its power, in spite of the more intelligent section of the community. But when this section, though a minority, takes resolute action, the despot may be overthrown by a revolution achieved by a comparatively small circle of men. The inert great masses are then no real obstacle. A palace conspiracy, aided by outsiders in influential position, may oust or cow the tyrant, and effect a change in the Parliamentary sense. And if, in a despot-ridden country, things are to be bettered at all, some first attempts of the kind must be made, at one time or other, without waiting for the slow process of the gradual enlightenment of the masses—or else a country would be kept forever in a vicious circle. Despots do not grant the rights necessary for such gradual education. Macaulay saw this; and he was not a revolutionist of very pronounced type."

After a quarter of a century, many layers of the Russian population have so far advanced that there is now one of the best chances of victory over an antiquated, barbarous and internally corrupt Absolutism. The hearts and the hopes of all freemen throughout the world are with those who have manfully entered into the struggle with the autocratic fiend.

KARL BLIND.